

Teaching Dhamma by Pictures



Explanation of a Siamese Traditional Buddhist Manuscript
by
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 [2015](#)

Alternate format: [\[html\]](#)

- Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa -

Editors note

The manual transcription of the English original has derived from a *Dhamma-Dana* book (generously shared by „The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundation“ www.budaedu.org) , "Teaching *Dhamma* by Picture" - Explanation of a Siamese Traditional Buddhist Manuscript which was printed for the 100 years anniversary of Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's birthday and published by the Sathirakoses-Nagaparadi Foundation & Ministry of Education, Thailand. Even if the book mentioned Ven. Buddhadasa as the author, it is not clear if not his friend, the Ven. Phra Thepwisutthimethi (Nguam, 1906-1993) wasn't the actually author. However, this book shows many impressions of the traditional practice of monks in South-East Asia and about the high culture even in the frame of Buddhism when we look at the use of Khmer-scripts on the paintings. The transcriptions has been edited with foot notes and links to further resources which are not included in the original and lead to other pages. By clicking a certain picture you may get also a bigger view of it.

The additions in regard of the pictures have been mand by Sulak Sivaraksa and Don Sweetbaum and the comments in breaks are add by Ven. Bhikkhu Khantipalo.

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Introduction

The use of pictures as a method for explaining the *Dhamma* (Buddhist Teachings) has been popular in Siam since the Sukhothai or early Ayuthai period. The manner of representation has undergone, of course, various changes through the years so that the pictures illustrate period art as well as *Dhamma*. Though there is still disagreement in fixing the date of some illustrations, the examples presented here are of the Bangkok period (about 100 years old). Three illustrated manuscripts of this period on *Dhamma* have been found in the town of Chaiya (Surathani Province) and the volume presented here is the largest of them. Upon examination, it was found that all three manuscripts have the same theme for their illustrations.

The illustrated manuscript reproduced here was, in the original, a traditional Thai manuscript called Samut Khoi which is a long roll of paper folded concertina-wise into leaves and then written on both sides. In this form, the illustration was presented first, followed by a few lines of explanation on a particular aspect of *Dhamma* such as Meditation and so forth. Cambodian script was used in those days for all religious work though the language is Siamese.

The pigments used were produced locally, most of them derived from native trees. The sequence of the illustrations has been rearranged here, for a more lucid presentation.

1. The six elements



This is an illustration of the six Elements^[1]. Four human figures paying respect to the king represent the Four Great Elements: Earth, Water, Fire and Air^[2] (Or of Solidity, Cohesion, Temperature and Mobility, which are the marks of all matter.) The fifth element, Space, surrounds the others. The king is a representation of the sixth element, *Viññanadhātu*, the Consciousness-element. The king (or the mind) is shown as superior to and in control of the other four (Earth, Water, Fire, Air) elements which represent corporeality. Space should be regarded as beyond, and distinct from, the mind (*nāma*) and body (*rūpa*) elements, although some schools of thought regard space as an aspect of mind. According to this latter approach, only two elements are present - mind and body. However, there are also the three elements of *rūpadhātu*, *arūpadhātu*, and *nirodhadhātu*. *rūpadhātu* is the element that has form and is composed of corporeal matter. *Arūpadhātu* is formless and abstract, while *nirodhadhātu* is the cessation of *nāma* (mind) and *rūpa* (body) and is experienced as

[1] You may read more about it in [MN140](#).

[2] Or: solidity, cohesion, temperature, and mobility as the properties of this *dharmas*.

voidness. The space element should be regarded as *nirodhadhātu*, and not as *rūpa* or *nāma*.

(The last three *dhātus* or elements, of form, formlessness and cessation, are not abstract ideas but relate to certain experiences won through the practice of calming, concentrating and enriching the mind with wisdom. In the same way, the first four great elements may also be experienced through mindfulness of the body.)

2. Mind and body



Here the symbolism is also to illustrate body and mind^[3]. Body is represented by the earth-ware vessels (carried by the man on the left) while mind is shown as the whimsical, swift and restless monkey. (The same symbolism of the monkey representing mind is found in the Lord Buddha's discourses (*Sutta*) as well as in the illustrated Wheel of Wandering-on as seen in Tibetan temples). The monkeys prove themselves adept at avoiding capture and the hunters have difficulty in spearing and shooting these agile creatures. The meaning is that the monkey (mind) is difficult to control. The body, however, is mere earth-ware, and cannot move by itself; it is easily broken and fragile. The combination of these two make up a human being.

[3] Understanding of 'Body and Kind', *nama-rupa* as a condition of right view in [MN9](#).

3. Mind – control



In this picture, the trees having cavities represent bodies and the snakes depicted here live within these cavities, or, metaphorically, the mind lives in the body. Hence, the snake, a dangerous and poisonous creature representing the mind, should be trained and controlled. One means of control calls for restraint (symbolised by the weapons in the illustration), while at other times one must be indulgent, using kindness as means to ultimate control. In short, both edges of the cut crystal must be used in taming the mind. The symbolism of the mind and the snake should not be taken lightly; both are potentially dangerous (leading one into pain and death. The snake's poison is carving (*taṇhā*^[4]) which in searching for pleasures and continued existence, is sure to kill one many times unless one takes firm steps to apply the antidote of *Dhamma*). The two corpses and three monks are a reminder that the mind is governed and subdued and death overcome through meditation.

[4] Sutta in regard of *tanha* you may find here in the [general index](#).

4. The way to escape from the five aggregates



There is a story here which one should know before studying the picture. A man who is fleeing from five thieves reaches a river where he discovers a floating corpse; he jumps onto it and crosses the river. Here instead of thieves, five birds have been drawn in the right hand corner and these also represent the five heaps (khandha) or aggregates: material quality (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), memory (*saññā*), volition (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāna*)^[5]. All of these are characterized by grasping (*upādāna*) and are complete analysis of one's self.

The rotting corpse, used to cross the river, is none other than one's loathsome and disagreeable body. (One should not suppose that the body in Buddhist Teaching is to be despised, nor are the consequences of doing so (self-torture) ever found in Buddhist Teachings. However, the true nature of the body has to be seen with insight -

[5] The five khandhas, clinging aggregation or accumulation, see more in the [general index](#).

as it really is and not as one wishes it might be since everyone knows, when they think about it, that it is naturally subject to old age, disease and death.) The corpse however, is still useful in reaching the further shore of *Nibbāna*^[6]. The monks, and the laypeople holding lotus blossoms are those who have realized the truth and recognized the danger of the five heaps which constitute a “person” and are no longer attached to them.

[6] More in regard of *Nibbana* in the [general index](#).

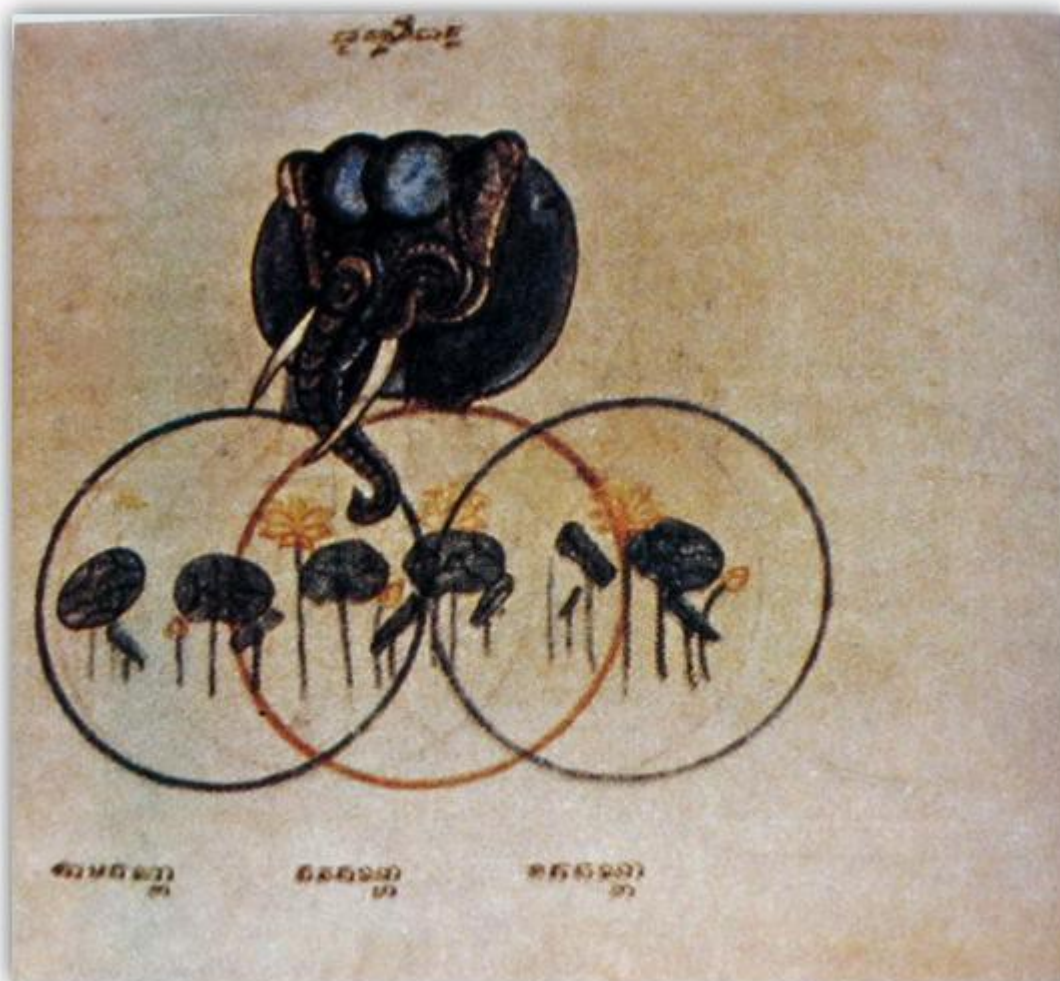
5. Wisdom sprung out of "the mud"



This picture is another symbol of mind and body, or *nāma* and *rūpa*. The body here, is represented as mud beneath the water while the mind is the lotus that springs from the mud. Unlike the loathsomeness of the body, the lotus is fragrant and pure. The turbulence of the waters and the fish therein are all the worldly desires which agitate the mind. The man emerging from the lotus is holding a disc and a sword which symbolize the wisdom that cuts off and removes all defilements (*kilesa*)^[7]. Defilement here, is represented by the boy approaching the enlightened man who, triumphant, pays no attention. The man in the right-hand corner holding the lotus-fruit has practised meditation and has found the way out of the darkness, having seen for himself the Fruit of *Dhamma*.

[7] *Kilesa*: Mind defilements or defilements of the mind, more in the [general index](#).

6. The three kinds of craving



In this illustration, an elephant symbolizing all beings is drawing water from the three ponds of craving, namely: craving for sensual pleasure, for existence and for non-existence. The drinking of ponds represents our indulgence in the three cravings^[8].

[8] Sutta in regard of the three kinds of craving, *tanha* [ti §58](#).

7. Dependent origination



Here, all beings (the elephant) having consumed the three ponds of craving are consumed by craving, as the elephant is itself gulped down by a small green frog, a symbol of craving (since ordinary frogs can inflate themselves while this one has managed to gorge itself with all the cravings!) The sequence of events illustrates the teaching of Dependent Arising (*Paticca-samuppāda*)^[9]. The water in the ponds is regarded as sensory contact (*phassa*) which gives rise to the three feelings (*vedanā*), which in turn leads to craving (*taṇhā*). Craving gives rise to grasping (*upādāna*)^[10] which leads to existence (*bhava*)^[11] and consequently causes birth (*jāti*)^[12].

[9] Or conditioned co-arising, you may look for *suttas, dhamma* teachings in the [general index](#).

[10] Clinging, attached, more in the [general index](#).

[11] Becoming, more in this regard in the [general index](#).

[12] See more in regard of *jati* in the [general index](#).

8. Dependent origination (continued)



The frog of craving (*taṇhā*) is now devoured by a snake (*upādāna* or grasping) which in turn is eaten by a bird (*bhava* or mental becoming) while the bird perched on the reeds (which are fragile and hollow, being without heartwood as our bodies and without an abiding soul) symbolizes birth (*jāti*). The roots of the reeds are being gnawed by four mice representing birth, old age, sickness and death, which events mark the passing of our lives.

9. Dependent origination (continued)



The symbols here are like those of the last picture: the bird having eaten the snake, the snake the frog, the frog the elephant, and the elephant having drained the three ponds of water. This picture, although by a different artist is used here to show a similar thought.

10. Ignorance



This is a representation of ignorance (*avijja*)^[13] and the method of overcoming it. The man in the middle of the picture straddles a demon, wielding a disc in one hand and a sword in the other. The demon is symbolic of ignorance, while the weapons represent wisdom and signify the victory of wisdom over ignorance. Both corners of the picture show different kinds of ignorance. In the right hand corner, the man feeding a cock indicates his attachment to his possessions and the fact he has become a slave to them.

In the left-hand corner, the man holding a snake and a fishing basket symbolizes ignorance by mistaking the snake for a fish. Here a man is mistaking evil for good, or suffering for happiness.

[13] *Avijja*, some times translated as not-knowing which does not mean absolutely knowing nothing. More in the [general index](#).

11. Ignorance and its results



This picture is divided into two sections, the lower half continuing the theme of ignorance. The lower left-hand picture of a man feeding his chickens shows he has now become servile to his own possessions due to their abundant increase. The right hand corner illustrates the unfruitful practice of fire-worship. (A brahminical practice still used in India as a rite for propitiating the gods. Formerly, also in Siam, brahminical rites and vows (*silabbata-paramāsa*) which is an aspect of ignorance).

The top half of the picture depicts the result of ignorance: a man caught in the wheel of continuous rebirth. The sequence of a man being bitten by a dog, drowning, and confronting a lion, teaches that once caught in the wheel of life, the captive neither realizes the significance, nor the cause of his plight; unsatisfactory experience (*dukkha*)^[14] has become a common part of his life.

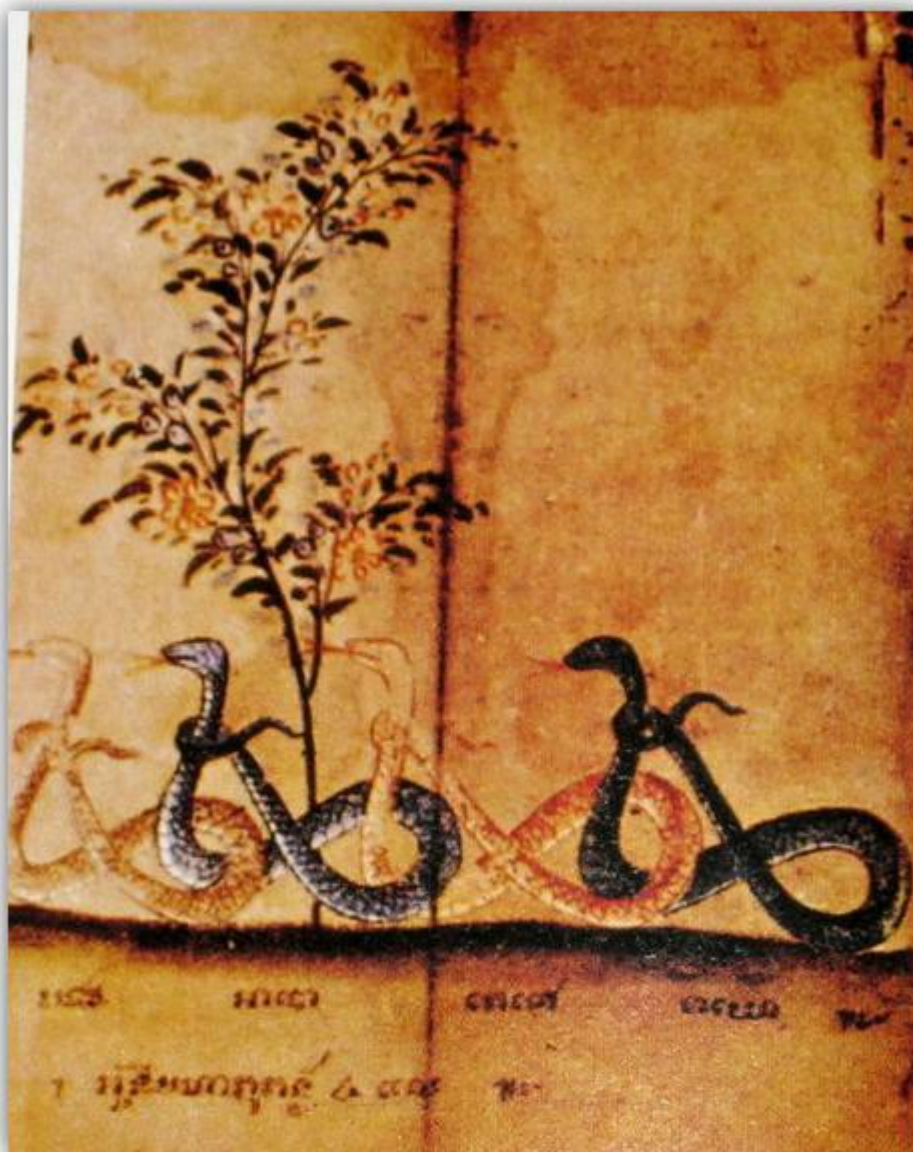
[14] *Dukkha*, suffering and stress or being unsatisfied. See more in the [general index](#).

12. Ignoring the truth



Here, the boy facing the lion does not fear it because he is not aware of the real danger. The lion represents the defilements of greed, anger, ignorance and lust as well as birth, old age, sickness and death. The young man is incapable of appreciating the danger confronting him because in his ignorance he still clings to the overt sensory perceptions of form, sound, taste, smell, and touch which are the bases for unsatisfactory experience. In contact to this state of ignorance, the figure above does realize life's perils. Having comprehended these elementary causes, he points them out to the young man who still persists in ignoring the truth.

13. Four kinds of attachment



The four snakes in this picture represent four kinds of attachment: *kāmuṭpādāna* (grasping arising from sense desires), *diṭṭhupādāna* (grasping at views philosophical and theological), *ṣilabbatupādāna* (grasping at belief in the efficacy of rites and vows), *attavādupādāna* (grasping at belief in a soul theory). Any manner of attachment is, of course, the result of ignorance and like the entwining of a snake. (It is noteworthy that these four graspings are shown by snakes looped and wound about each other indicating that all the graspings are interrelated. They illustrate very well the sense of being bound by or tied down to the ordinary round of life.)

14. Understanding and attachment



The man standing complacently as if unaware of his danger, (on the left of this picture), is entwined by the four snakes shown in the last illustration. The wise man on the right sits freely in his palace and recognizing them, points to the four kinds of grasping.

(Grasping at belief in the soul or abiding self is the snake which is poised over his head, while in his left hand he grasps at sense-desire. His right hand lays hold of theological and philosophical views while he is hobbled and cannot walk along the Practice-path of *Dhamma* because the snake of believe in the efficacy of rites and vows has him by the heels.)

15. The wheel of wandering-on



The four men confined in the inner circle represent again the four kinds of grasping, while the six men in the outer circle stand for the five sensory and one mental perception (seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing, touching, and thought). These sense-perceptions are the cause of suffering and entanglement in the Wheel of Wandering-on (in birth-and-death).*

So long as the men do not realize the truth, they cannot escape being trapped. Held captive by misunderstanding their perceptions, men are also subject to birth, old age, sickness and death.

* This is portrayed in great detail in the paintings of the Wheel of Wandering-on originating in India but a tradition now confined to Tibet. Three Wats in Siam now also possess such paintings: Suan *Mokkhabalārāma* in Chaiya, Wat Khao Krailas, Hua Hin, and Wat Bovoranives, Bangkok.

16. Ocean close to the eyes – unseen



The larger circle on the left with four men represent the wheel of birth, old-age, sickness and death. The fish in the smaller circle on the right are symbolic of all beings caught in the Wheel of Wandering-on.

Fish, in their natural habitat of water, do not recognize it as water because their environment has never changed so that they have no basis for comparison. Men too, are not aware of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) because they know nothing else. Water symbolizes the Ocean of Wandering-on, while the dry land close at hand, is *Nibbāna*^[15] that the fish think of approaching, (as men do not think to „approach“ *Nibbāna* which is so „close“ to them).

[15] The wheel of birth. See more in the [general index](#).

17. Effect of ignorance



The top part of the picture shows an elephant caught in the mud of ignorance. The harder the elephant struggles not knowing the correct way to free himself, the deeper he sinks. (This is exactly the same with many people who realize to some extent how they are trapped in their lives but who, as they fail to discern the cause of their troubles, cannot remedy them. The wise man standing nearby is detached from the turmoil and exhorts us to beware of this treacherous mud.) The two men at the bottom, are engaged in sawing through the tree of ignorance. Both of them wear crowns of high station signifying that no matter how high one's position, one is also subject to ignorance of real condition of *samara*. Thus attaining freedom is not easy. The wise man, seated at ease, is one who has realized the truth, being detached and free.

18. Wrong practice of buddha-dhamma



The Buddha, here representing the true teaching, is being attacked by three monks and one laymen. The fact that there is only one layman attacking the teachings indicates that many monks, once having been ordained in the order, continue to follow false path and are attached to ceremony. They are indifferent to the true teachings and prefer the Wheel of Wandering-on to *Nibbāna*.

(Monks, as they are more conspicuous than layman and because they are supposed to be devoting their lives to the Three Gems, and because it is known that they have many precepts to keep pure, can attack the *Dhamma* by misconduct in a more violent way than is possible for laypeople)

19. Right practice of buddha-dhamma



This picture illustrates the adoration of the Three Gems by four persons representing the four constituents of the Buddhist community: a monk (*bhikkhu*), nun (*bhikkhunī*)^[16], layman (*upāsaka*) and laywoman (*upāsikā*)^[17]. For some reason or other, it has not been completed.

[16] In regard of the monastic life of a "beggar" here in the [general index](#).

[17] More in regard of laity and householder: [general index](#).

20. Acceptance of the dhamma



The monks carrying a fan in this picture, shows acceptance of *Dhamma* for both thorough study (*pariyatti*) and practice (*patipatti*). (Study without practice produces the dry scholar for whom all wisdom is found in books. Practice without study though often accompanied by intense but blind faith, easily leads to taking a wrong path. These two are complementary aspects and if one or the other is lacking, it is not likely that one will be able to gain realization of *Dhamma* or penetration [*pativedha*].)

21. Meditation in a secluded place



This picture depicts meditation in a secluded place. According to the *Pāli* Canon, such a place is found at the foot of a tree, in a forest or cave, on a mountain, in a cemetery, jungle, or in a peaceful and secluded open space.

(The cultivation of solitude in living (*kāya-viveka*) is useful for the development of solitude of the heart (*citta-viveka*) when it is separated from mental defilements, and this in turn leads on to the ultimate solitude, the final separation from all bases for future existence - *upadhi-viveka*)

22. Contemplation on corpses i-ii



At this point, we have reached the essential method of meditation taught through this book: reflection on foulness (*asubha kammaṭṭhāna*)^[18] or the use of corpses as objects for contemplation and realization of impermanence. (There are ten Reflections on Foulness given in the Discourses and in the „Path of Purification“ Visuddhimagga each of the corpses varying according to the stage of decay reached. However, Teachers of meditation in Siam often teach that one should see one’s own body as though it were one of these corpses. Only then will one find Freedom (*vimutti*)^[19] from the idea that the body is „me“ or „mine“.) There are two corpses in this picture, and the monks are using both the bloated corpse (*uddhumāta*) at the top, and the livid corpse from green to blue-black in colour (*vinīlaka*) at the bottom, as objects of meditation. The purpose of this type of meditation is to lead the monk to the realization of the changeability and unwholesomeness of the body. Once this is thoroughly understood, a monk can no longer be attached to his body.

(The „Path of Purification“, Chapter VI says that the former type is suitable for one who is greedy about shape, form or figure since it makes evident the disfigurement of the body’s shape. The latter, the livid, is recommended for those greedy for the skin’s colour and complexion since the disfiguring of the skin’s colour is evident.)

[18] *Asubha*, the un-beauty, most in relation with the body. See more in the [general index](#).

[19] *Vimutti*, Liberation or peace in [general index](#).

23. Contemplation on corpses iii-iv



Above is seen a festering corpse (*vipubbaka*) while below is a cut-up corpse (*vicchiddaka*). Both are being used as objects of meditation. (The former suited to those keen about the body's smell when scents and perfumes are used, since it makes evident the foul stench of this sore, the body; while the latter is useful for those who think of the body as „one thing“, since hollowness and lack of singleness becomes evident in the cut-up corpse.)

24. Contemplation on corpses v-vi



The corpse in the top part of this picture is called “the gnawed” (*vikkhāyita*) or one which has been dismembered and gnawed by dogs. The one below is called “the scattered” (*vikkhittaka*), or a corpse that has been separated and scattered by its exposure to nature and beasts. (the gnawed is suited to those who lust after accumulation of flesh in such places as the breasts since it makes plain how such prized flesh-masses come to naught. “The scattered” should be used by those who are greedy for grace of limbs for it can be seen how without grace are scattered limbs.)

25. Contemplation on corpses vii-viii



The corpse at the top is known as “the hacked and scattered” (*hatavikkhittaka*), and the one below is called “*lohitaka*” or a bleeding corpse. (The first is recommended for the use of those who have greed for beauty of the body as a whole since it makes evident the disintegration and alteration of the body. The bleeding corpse is suitable for one greedy in seeing elegance of ornaments and fine cloth since the body’s repulsiveness when smeared by blood.)

26. Contemplation on corpses ix-x



This picture completes the sequence of ten objects of contemplation of the foul by illustrating a worm-infested corpse (*puluwaka*) at the top, and the bone's remaining from a corpse at the bottom (*att'hika*).

(The first of these suits those who think that “this body is mine”, for having this sense of ownership over the body they must be rather disillusioned to see a corpse shared with many families of worms. As the “Path of Purification” also says: “This is shared by many and creatures live in dependence on (all parts and organs) and feed (on them). And there they are born, grow, old and die, evacuate and pass water; and the body is their maternity home, their hospital, their charnel ground, their privy and their urinal...” The last of the ten reflections upon foulness is for those who are greedy about having and seeing fine bones, especially teeth, since the repulsiveness of bones is evident.

(If one passes over these pages quickly or finds them of little interest, this will reveal the fact that one has little inclination to face the true nature of one's body instead prefer these subjects of great interest since they help to eliminate greed, making him dispassionate regarding the body, which does not in any case, “belong” to anyone.)

27. Three essentials for successful practice



This picture deals with the three essentials for successful practice of *Dhamma*. They are: preference (*chanda*)^[20], energy (*viriya*)^[21], and self-confidence (*vesārajjā*). Preference here is expressed by two Devas holding gems or diamonds in their hands. The man working the bellows is an expression of energy and action necessary to create the fire, which in turn, is powerful enough to melt any material. The next part of the picture shows a mouse chasing two tigers and is an example of self-confidence. For if we wish to practice *Dhamma*, we must be confident and resolute in fighting the tigers of the defilements.

[20] Desire as a factor of the path (*dhamma-chanda*) in the [general index](#)

[21] Virija, power or effort, energy: [general index](#).

28. Sammasaññana and udayabbayañña



Having already expressed preference, exerted the necessary energy and having replaced fear with self-confidence, one is in a position to depict the various stages on the path of achieving knowledge (*ñāṇa*) Illustrations twenty-eight to thirty-eight depict the various stages on the path of achieving knowledge (by which one should understand is meant not book-knowledge but “experience of truth” in one’s own mind and body).

The first part of this picture deals with knowledge derived from the contemplation of rising and ceasing of all forms of existence (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*) while the bottom half is related to knowledge achieved from the preparatory stage of meditation called the “thorough-knowledge” (*sammadana-ñāṇa*) of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self-ness which precedes the attainment of insight.

Having already considered the truth pertaining to birth, old age and death, the standing figure on the bottom right hand side has consequently attained spiritual wisdom (*paññā*). The child on the left hand side is a representation of birth, the old man sitting and mashing his betel nut symbolizes the limitations of old age, while the corpse in the centre is death as well as the realization and appreciation of death arising due to thorough knowledge. By the attainment of this knowledge, one can clearly see and understand the quality of impermanence (*aniccā*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and selflessness (*anattā*). However, in the achievement of insight, (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), knowledge of the foregoing three characteristics (*tilakkaṇa*)^[22] is not counted as the first step (i.e. it is not included as one of the nine levels for arriving at insight.)

Naturally broader in scope, the latter knowledge offers general and unspecific impressions while if we compare the knowledge of rising and ceasing with *sammasana-ñāṇa*, it can be seen that the former is more specialized and exact.

(For these knowledges explained in detail, see the “Path of Purification” - Visuddhimagga translation from Sema, Colombo, Ceylon, Chapter XXI)

[22] More in regard of the three characteristics, *anatta*, *dukkha*, *anicca* in the [general index](#).

29. Bhaṅgañāṇa and bhayañāṇa



The lower half of this picture is an allegory on the knowledge consisting of the contemplation of the dissolution of all forms of existence (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). This is the second stage of insight-knowledge. The picture shows a wise man meditating upon a corpse. Here, the aspirant ignores the rising aspect and devotes his mind exclusively to the aspect of cessation in order to discover, more profoundly, that all things are continuously ceasing. The top part of the picture illustrates the knowledge of fearfulness (*bhaya-ñāṇa*), or insight derived from concentration upon the fearfulness of all compounded things (*saṅkhāra*)^[23].

The three thieves stand for the three states of existence (*bhava*); *kāma**bhava*, *rūpa**bhava* and *arūpa**bhava* or sensual existence, the existence of subtle form, and formless existence all of which are fearsome, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and devoid of soul or self. They are not therefore to be desired.

[23] More about formation, mental formation or fabrication in the [general index](#).

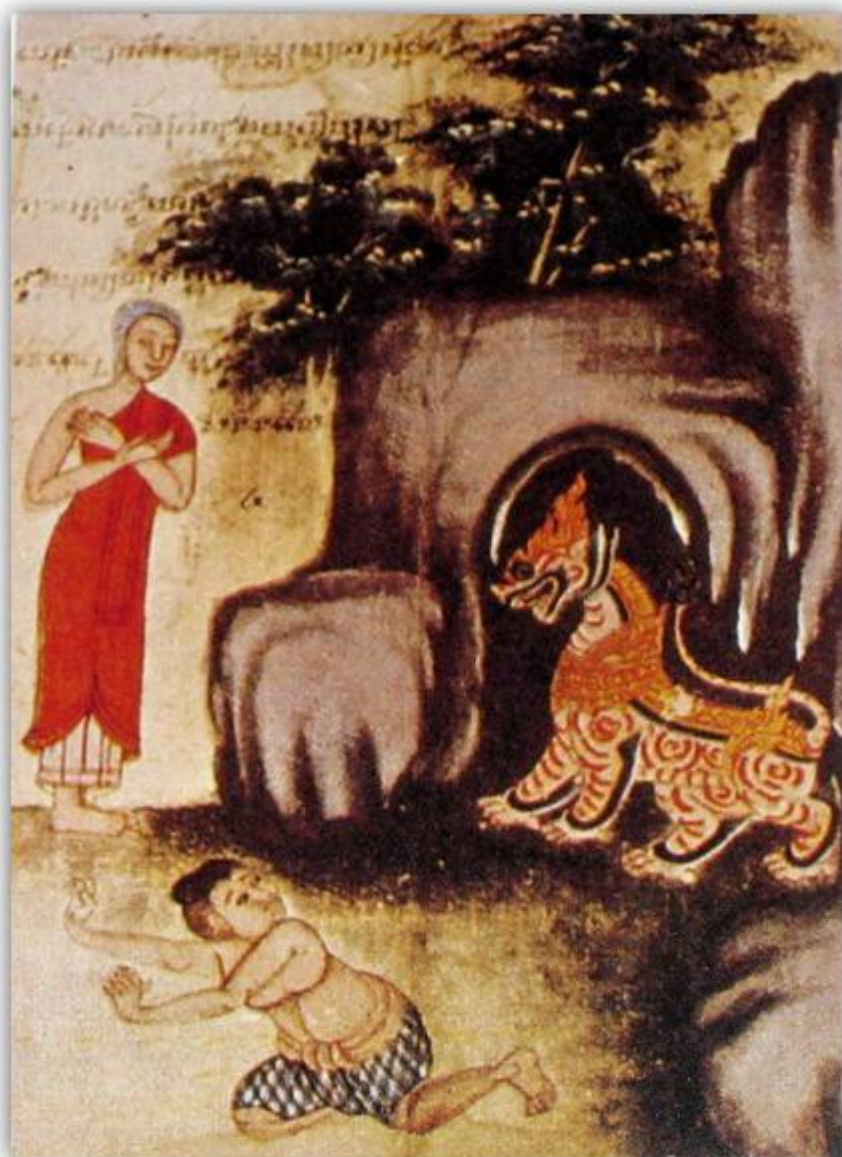
(Sensual existence includes: Human birth and animal conditions which are well-known to us, besides a number of other states, all woeful such as those of hungry ghosts and of the hell-wraiths which of course are normally invisible. Also found here are the six celestial heavens of sensual pleasure. In the second state of existence are the various level of Brahma-worlds corresponding to attainment of mental absorptions (*jhāna*)^[24] beyond the range of sensuality in which form is very subtle.

The formless types of existence correspond to the formless attainments (*arūpa-smāpatti*) in which there is only the experience of subtle mentality (*nāma*), beyond the range of any sort of body (*rūpa*).

Birth into all these states is governed by the *kamma* or intentional actions of the individual. All these states of existence, heavens and bells are impermanent.)

[24] More about mental absorption in the [general index](#).

30. Bhayañāṇa (by other artist)



This picture also illustrates the theme of the knowledge of fearfulness but is by a different artist. Here the boy (or the immature person) is frightened by the lion while above the aspiring monk, (who stands for the mature person able to face unwelcome but true facts) realizes the fearsomeness of all compounded things.

31. Ādīnavañāṇa und Nibbidañāṇa



The top half of this picture illustrates the fourth stage in insight meditation, knowledge consisting in the contemplation of danger, *ādīnava-ñāṇa*. Having arrived at the third stage of knowledge, one realizes that all compounded things are the source of misery and should in the foreground reminds the aspirant that all compounded things are the source of danger. (There is nothing which is compounded, such as mind and body, can be any sort of refuge as they are menaced by decay and death.)

In the lower half of the picture, the burning house illustrates the fifth state of knowledge (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*) or knowledge derived from the contemplation of aversion. The aspirant, once having witnessed the house of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self-ness go up in flames, will now avoid and fear all compounded elements. ("House" is often used as a symbol for the body which is burning all the time with change and decay, and burns after death upon the pyre.)

32. Muccitukamyatāñña



Rāhu, the celestial monster who was said to be the cause of eclipses by eating the moon, is the central character in illustrating the sixth stage of knowledge, *muccitukamyatā-ñña*, or the desire for deliverance. The aspirant to this knowledge, symbolized by the moon, seeks to escape the destruction imposed by the celestial monster who represents the round of rebirths (*samsāra*)^[25] This picture is popularly used on the gates to Siamese monasteries to remind the faithful to free themselves from the round of rebirth.

(This may be compared with the more complicated Wheel of Wandering-on (*samsarācakra*) which is found in the entrance of the great majority of Tibetan Buddhist temples where it fulfills the same function - a reminder and a warning of the perils of the Wandering-on)

[25] *Samsara*, the wheel of wandering on in the [general index](#)

33. Muccitukamyatāñña



Identical with the theme in picture No. 32, this illustration shows a frog trying to escape from the mouth of a snake, thus symbolizing our efforts to seek release from the unsatisfactory nature of the world.

(Below a *bhikkhu* sits upon a throne-like seat in a wild, rocky place. This kind of spot is suitable for seeking release while the throne-like seat indicates the exalted nature of one who strives sincerely for that release.)

34. Muccitukamyatāñña



Desire for deliverance, in this case the sixth stage of knowledge, is shown by a different symbolism, by a serpent attempting to secure its freedom from the *garuda* (a mythical bird akin to the roc of Arabian legends)

35. Muccitukamyatāñña



The same theme of desire for deliverance is repeated here. The cock in its cage at the top of the picture, and the fish hooked while swallowing the bait at the bottom, both illustrate confinement, and the need of those upon this path of knowledge to Enlightenment, to be free from worldly confinements and entanglements.

(This picture, the three above and the one over the page. [altogether five pictures] stress the great importance of this stage of knowledge. Ordinary people not understanding the state of world and of their particular bits of it - mind and body - have therefore no reason for desiring deliverance, but once the true state of the wandering-on in birth-and-death is appreciated then this knowledge becomes foremost in the heart.)

36. Muccitukamyatāñña and patisañkañña



The barking deer caught in a snare desire freedom, once more emphasizing the importance of the sixth stage of knowledge. The bottom half of this picture depicts the seventh stage of knowledge, that derived from reflective contemplation, *patisañkañña*. This picture is related to the tenth in the first part in which a man mistakes a snake for a fish and carries it home holding it very unwisely so that it may strike and kill him. Here, however the man has the snake firmly gripped by the neck and is being told of its danger by a wise man, so that he wants to be rid of this poisonous snake of the mental defilements (*kilesa*). But before he can get rid of the snake, he must first weaken it by seizing its neck tightly, thus freeing it from his arm. Next he must raise it above his head, swinging it rapidly until the snake weakens. Close to death, the snake can be easily tossed away; or it can be beaten to death afterwards. Paying respects to the Triple Gem is one way to reduce the influence of defilements (and others are Giving, Keeping the Precepts and development of the mind by meditative practice). All such worthy practices should be accumulated in opposition to the power exerted by the defilements.

37. Saṅkhārupekkhāñña



Saṅkhārupekkhā-ñña: The knowledge of equanimity in respect of all compounded aspects of existence. Previously, the aspirant was attached to the phenomena of existence: his body (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), memory (*saññā*), volitions (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), which he mistook for his ego or personality. By placing confidence in the reality of these false impressions, he was a victim of the process of existence (*bhava*). No longer held captive by them, he has become indifferent to their pressures and confinements. Like the man in the illustration who watches his former wife making love to another man, he is free from emotional distress and involvement. He is completely unaffected and indifferent.

38. Saccānulomika-ñāṇa



Saccānulomikā-ñāṇa: The ninth stage of knowledge derived from conformity with truth. The ship represents the body (*rūpa*) and the owner of the ship, standing at the bow is mind (*citta*)^[26].

The ship is crossing from the burning world of mortality to the other shore of *Nibbāna*, which is represented by the Three Gems to which the owner of the ship (mind) points. The crew and equipment aboard are the various teachings necessary to cross the seas of wandering-on in birth-and-death (*samsāra*). The Noble Eight-fold Path and other necessary *Dhamma* such as faith (*saddhā*), or wisdom (*paññā*^[27]) are essential required to guide the ship across. Of these teachings, Right View (*Sammādiṭṭhi*^[28])** is the most important.

[26] *Citta*, mind or heart: [Suttas in AN in regard of mind](#).

[27] More about panna, wisdom or insight in the [general index](#)

[28] Right view in [path to freedom](#).

The importance of right view and wisdom is shown by the bird perched atop the mast of the ship. Should the ship go astray, the bird is sent out to establish the correct course. This practice of using a sea-bird for navigational purposes dates back to the time three or four thousand years ago, when compasses and other navigational instruments were not available. Steering from the stern of the ship is the captain who represents Right Mindfulness (*Sammāsati*^[29]) representiert.

* The same symbolism is used for *nāma-rūpa*, or mentality-materiality in the Wheel of Wandering-on.

** Right View (or understanding) is that which leads one inwards to *Nibbāna* after seeing which it should be translated as: Perfect View. Others views (philosophical, or theological) lead one upon other paths and are called Wrong Views, or those which lead astray from *Nibbāna*. Other factors of the Eightfold Path are "Right" or "Wrong" for the same pragmatic reason.

[29] More about right mindfulness in [path to freedom](#).

39. Gotrabhūñāṇa



This picture illustrates maturity of knowledge (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*). Here the aspirant points to the Three Gems upon the ornate throne and signifies that he has finally taken *Nibbāna* as the object of his meditation. At this stage, he is prepared to transcend the “family” (*gotra*) of ordinary mortals and progress into the realm of the Noble Ones (*ariya*), which term also means those who have developed.*

* See pic. No. 41

40. Gotrabhūāñāṇa



Maturity of knowledge is also the subject in this picture. Here the cow which represents the ordinary person, is free from its pen because now it has mindfulness (symbolized by the rope), and is thus free from the round of rebirths. Upon leaving its enclosure mature knowledge arises. Freedom has been secured through the use of mindfulness and wisdom symbolized by the sharp-edged spear so that the cow is prepared to abandon its common worldliness for the supermundane of *Nibbāna*. A dramatic transformation is shown in the upper picture where instead of a penned cow, a man upon the supermundane path flies effortlessly, holding two lotuses in his hands. (Perhaps symbolizing purity and compassion.)

41. Attainment of noble fruits



After attaining maturity of knowledge, one arrives at *magga-ñāṇa* or knowledge of the path leading to *Nibbāna*, following upon which one attains *phala-ñāṇa* (Fruition-knowledge), which is recognition of the Path.

Magga-ñāṇa and *phala-ñāṇa* are obtained through the process of:

- 1. stream-entering (*sotāpaññā*)
- 2. once-returning (*sakadāgāmī*)
- 3. never-returning (*anāgamī*)
- 4. Arahantship (*arahatta*)

The four stages of this development* are represented by the four levels of lotuses in the picture and by the seated monks. The fully opened and blooming lotus stands for the *Arahant* or completely Enlightened One.

*The ancient Discourses describe four kinds of Noble Persons each of which has penetrated to *Nibbāna*, their experiences being of varying depth so that they destroy to a different degree various aspects of the defilements.

A stream-enterer is one who has just entered upon the realm of the Noble Ones and is sure in any case to attain *Nibbāna*. A once-returner still has sufficient defilements to ensure his rebirth once amongst men, while a never-returner, once his physical body has died, can no longer be reborn to this state of being but will attain *Nibbāna* while existing in the upper realm of the Brahmaworlds called the Pure Abodes (*suddhāvāsa*). The *Arahant* (one who is accomplished) is the last of the four Noble Ones. He has made an end of the mental defilements and so come to the end of being driven onward in birth-and-death. He has reached complete purity and knows the bliss of *Nibbāna*. Although monks are shown as attaining these four stages since they have the greatest opportunity to do so, these attainments are also open to diligent laypeople.

42. Four stages of knowledge



This is another way of explaining the four stages of knowledge leading to *Nibbāna*. Knowledge in conformity with truth (*saccānulomikā-ñāṇa*) is illustrated by the man (lower left-hand corner) who has just found a precious stone while plucking lotuses at a lotus pond, while the man holding the gem (bottom right) symbolizes the attainment of mature knowledge (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*). At top-left the man joyfully raising the gem above his head signifies Knowledge of the Path (*magga-ñāṇa*), and the man top-right appreciating the flawless quality of that gem symbolizes *phala-ñāṇa* or Fruition of the Path.

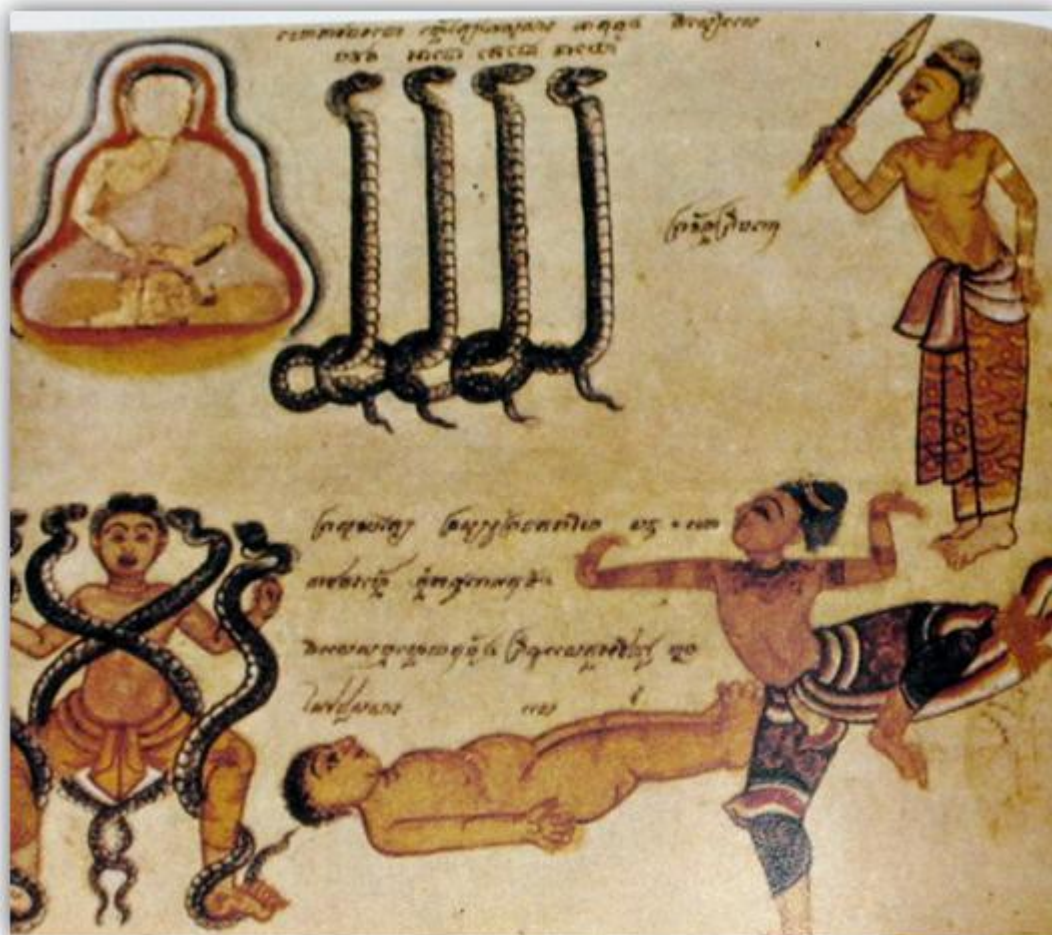
43. Nibbāna



The monk reclining at ease surrounded by the beauty of many flowers is a representation of *Nibbāna* which is beyond the preceding knowledge, (and is adorned with the beauty and fragrance of wisdom and compassion). There is no longer concern with appreciation or admiration of the gem since the final stage has already been attained.

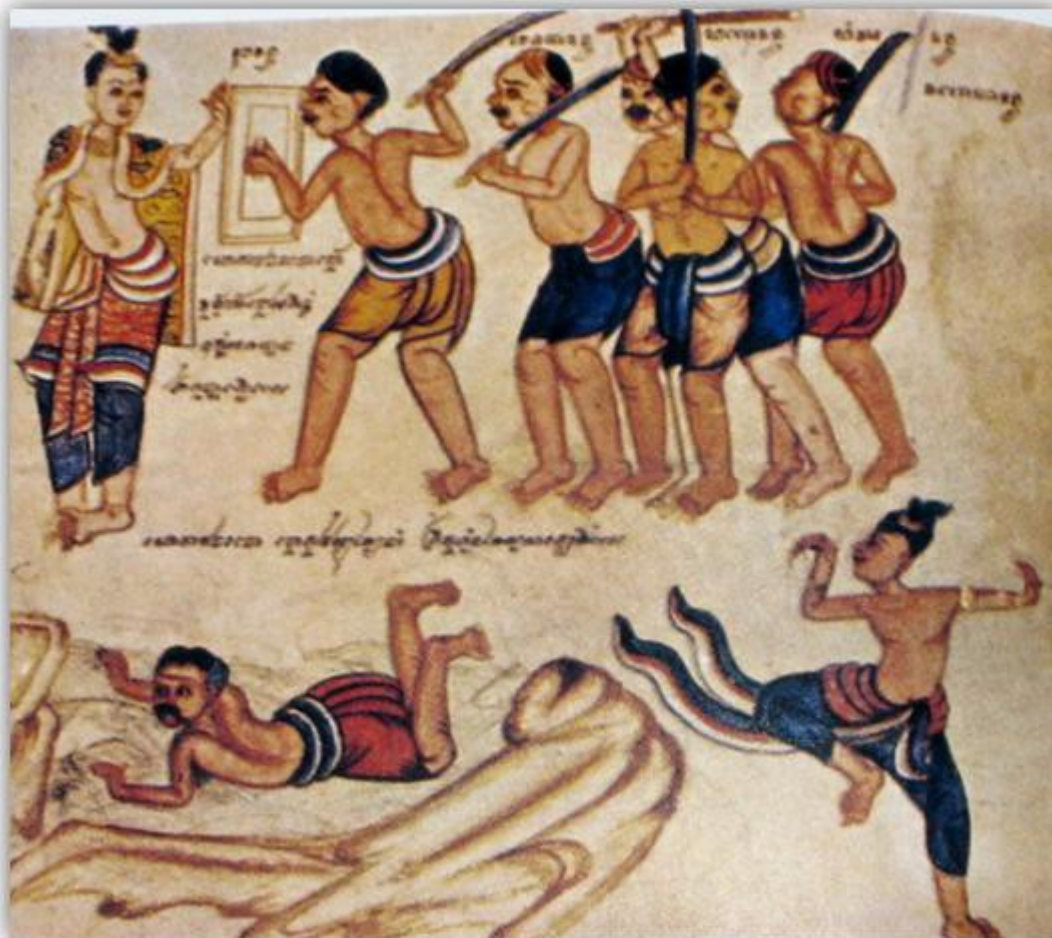
(Hence in the two pictures below, the gem has been cast upon the ground while one enlightened being joyfully investigates the world, the other sits tranquilly in enjoyment of inner peace and clarity. It is noteworthy that of these two figures, one is not a monk, thus illustrating that the highest goal is not only for those who practice in the homeless life.)

44. Freedom from clinging



This picture points out the contrast between freedom and clinging: sensuous grasping (*kāmupādāna*), grasping at view (*ditṭhupādāna*), grasping at belief in the efficacy of rites and vows (*silabbatupādāna*), and grasping at belief in a soul theory (*attavādupādāna*). These four kinds of grasping are represented by the four snakes that entwine and overcome their victim. One must, therefore, use the sword of wisdom to subdue grasping. One method of employing the sword is through meditation on corpses. Once relieved of the burden of grasping and attachment one attains absolute freedom as expressed in the grace and delicacy of the dancer in the right hand corner.

45. Freiheit von Anhaftung



The figure drowning in the sea of *samsāra*, the wandering-on, is contrasted with the wise and free man whose dance symbolizes release and liberation. The top half of his picture contrasts freedom and ignorance. Ignorance in this instance is defined as one's grasping or attachment to the constituents of one's own personality (*upādāna-khandha* - the five aggregates or heaps), which are here portrayed by five thieves.

46. Nibbāna and samsāra



The hooked fish and the man struggling to stop himself drowning here express the bondage of *samsāra*. Contrasted to this state of turbulence are four men at the top who have become Noble disciples. Seated tranquilly around the Three Gems that signify *Nibbāna*, they are last released from the unsatisfactoriness of the world.

(This unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) is of course not “out there” in the world, but lies in the hearts of all unenlightened persons being the result of their defilements.)

47. The value of buddha – dhamma



The woman here represents the weakness encountered when confronting the Five Heaps or Aggregates personified by the five thieves. Lacking the courage to resist, and unable to help herself, she must depend on or seek help from someone else. In this case, religion or the *Dhamma* here represented by the monk, is the source of sufficient strength to subjugate the Five Heaps. Once she embraces and follows the Practice-Path, she frees herself from the threat of the Five Heaps. Deliverance from danger and fear is dependent upon realization and practice of the *Dhamma*. Realization is the ultimate goal and practice of the *Dhamma* is the means whereby one may help oneself.